



LUTHERAN SOCIAL SERVICES National Capital Area

Celebrating Over 100 Years of Serving Boldly

Issue No. 2 2018



A Brave Girl's Attempt to End the HIV Epidemic

By: Dara Yah'ya, Youth Development & Wellness Manager

Just 14 days earlier she shared how nervous she was to disclose her status to her boyfriend. Now she was back at Group sharing her success story. "I used the plan we talked about at camp. At first he made me mad, but I calmed myself down and educated him. I realized he was really ignorant about it. At the end he said, 'You just have to stay healthy

and keep taking your medicine; we'll be fine" That day at Group, Katrina's story about how supportive her boyfriend was quelled the fears that most everyone in the room had: 'Will I be lonely, can I ever have a family?'

Before camp, Katrina avoided her doctor's appointments and sometimes skipped medication to avoid anyone finding out about her diagnosis. Plus, she said doing those things sent her into a whirlwind of self-judgement. Who would ever understand, who would not judge her? Ashley, another client living with a mental health diagnosis, gave this same reason as to why she would sometimes not pick up her prescriptions. Through Youth Development & Wellness (YDW) Care Navigation Services and Wellness Support Groups both girls get accompanied to appointments when they need it most; and they receive support to help them stay engaged in health care services and community resources ensuring they get the full spectrum of care necessary to attain maximum health.

Katrina is now preparing to be a Youth Haven Kids Camp Counselor to support younger children in dealing with HIV, Mental Health, and Substance Use stigmas. She says her advice to them will be, "It doesn't matter how people think; get the help that keeps you healthy and keep the friends who accept you and make you feel great."

In addition to taking care of herself because of the program, Katrina is actively helping to end the HIV epidemic by being open about her diagnosis where it matters and educating others. Science has proven that a person successfully on treatment cannot transmit the HIV virus. In this new era where treatment is prevention and people living with HIV can have a full and vibrant life, it leaves STIGMA as one of the major obstacles to ending the HIV epidemic and it remains a serious barrier to treatment for mental health and substance use. YDW provides stigma-reduction, youth-focused services and individual support to help young people like Katrina and Ashley normalize their conditions and understand that seeking treatment is just like being treated for any other condition (e.g., taking insulin for diabetes).

Katrina and Ashley are doing their part, the question is, are you doing yours? Get tested, seek treatment, and at all times interrupt stigma. YDW offers a Facts Not Fear training to teach churches and community members how to reduce stigma and become more compassionate and supportive. Want to schedule a presentation in your congregation? Contact Dara Yah'ya at YahyaD@LSSNCA.org.

*The Youth Development and Wellness program operates solely on YOUR donations.
Send a child to camp this summer, gift encouragement and support, and stifle the HIV epidemic.
Contact Susan at HaineS@lssnca.org*

Lutheran Social Services of the National Capital Area LSSNCA.ORG United Way #8146 CFC #78343

THE "LESSER-KNOWN" SERVICE

REFUGEE ART ON DISPLAY

SEND A CHILD TO CAMP

EXPRESSIONS OF ABUNDANCE HIGHLIGHTS URMS

2 RIS

4 Community

5 Volunteer

6 Development

THE SURVIVAL STORY
OF SIX REFUGEE
SIBLINGS

Inspirational Read page 3

IMMIGRATION: The “Lesser-Known” Service of LSS/NCA

By: Liliana Canales, Immigration Services Staff

You have welcomed those who have been granted new beginnings in our country, and in doing so, you have strengthened our community through compassion and vibrant diversity. As many leave behind their homes, loved ones, and careers, LSS/NCA provides immigrants and refugees aid in building their lives in the United States. Below are a few “lesser-known” services of LSS/NCA that your support offers to those seeking refuge and safety.

Adjustment of Status:

The process to apply for lawful permanent resident status (also known as applying for a Green Card) when applicant is present in the United States.

Naturalization:

U.S. citizenship is granted to a foreign citizen or national after fulfilling the requirements established by Congress in the Immigration and Nationality Act.

Petition for Alien Relatives:

A U.S. citizen can file a petition for the following “immediate relatives,” as defined by immigration law: Children, unmarried and under age 21; Parents, if the petitioner is age 21 or over; and Spouse.

Employment Authorization:

An employment authorization document (EAD card), known generally as a work permit, is a document issued by United States Citizenship and Immigration

Services (USCIS) that provides temporary employment authorization to noncitizens.

Green Card Renewal:

Immigrants must renew their green card, if they are a permanent resident, with a Form I-551, which is valid for 10 years, or if the card is either expired or will expire within the next six (6) months.

Do you know someone who may benefit from these services?

Please let them know we offer these services for an income-based fee.

Appointments can be scheduled through our Immigration Coordinator at immigration@LSSNCA.org or (703) 698-5026 ext.139.

The Power of a Positive Spirit: **MEWAEEL'S STORY**

By: Rosita Ebadat and Dagnenet Mekonnen, Refugee Services Staff

When Mewael was 19 years old, he was in a car accident with some of his college friends. The accident left him paralyzed from the waist down. Then, he was called into Ethiopia's mandatory draft. He fled for his survival.

This spring, 23-year-old Mewael was accepted as a refugee to the United States of America. With only a few weeks to prepare for his arrival, we scrambled to make the appropriate accommodations. His special needs made his case unusual but by the time of his arrival in late March, we were ready to welcome him with open arms. Mewael's aunt, uncle, and cousin joined our staff at the airport for a warm welcome to Virginia.

From the moment he arrived, Mewael was ready to embark on his bright new journey, providing us copies of his documents and making sure we had everything we needed to help him prepare for the future ahead. He never stopped smiling, handed out hugs like candy, and without speaking a word, we knew that this opportunity meant everything to him.

Mewael has not allowed his paraplegia to hinder his road to self-sufficiency. Our staff and community have worked together to ensure he had a new wheelchair, ramp, and various other medical equipment. Today, we pass along



Mewael's appreciation to the abundance of volunteers and donors who have aided in the makings of his own American Dream.

Mewael told us that, for some time after the accident, he did not want any pictures taken of him. He did not want to be reminded of the pain he endured in his past. But because of you, he is stronger, healthy, and hopeful. And he is no longer shying away from the camera!

They Had Each Other: The Survival Story of Six Refugee Siblings

By: Davina Abujudeh, URM Social Worker

My colleagues, a set of foster parents, and I waited anxiously outside a gate at Ronald Reagan Airport. Most of us were sipping coffee, as it was already past 11pm. Despite the hour, we all felt the tension of excitement. We would be welcoming a family of six siblings. The four younger siblings, age 10-16 at the time, would be placed in a licensed foster home that would also house two adult sisters. The fact we were able to identify a home willing to foster the four youth, AND house the two adults, was a feat we boasted about for weeks.

We did not see excitement when the six siblings walked cautiously out of the gate and in our direction, we saw fear, confusion, exhaustion, hunger, and even a little sadness. The group looked completely overwhelmed and clung to each other as though they would be stripped from one another at any moment. They did not speak a word of English, but that didn't stop me from embracing them as though I had known them for years.

In the months following, the siblings began to adjust to their lives in the U.S. The two youngest girls quickly learned English and the two brothers expressed interest in soccer and weightlifting. All were enrolled in local public schools and the METS program, designed to bring youth, with gaps in their formal education, up to grade level. The two adult sisters began

to develop plans for their full independence as young women.

We saw their personalities bloom. Sadaf, the fiery and fierce 11-year-old sister who served as the self-appointed family advocate; Nadia, the sweet 10-year-old who would run and jump into the arms of our staff; Faisal, the reserved and awkward 15-year-old brother who struggled to come out of his shell like any other teenage boy; and Noormal, the 16-year-old brother who had spent most of his childhood supporting his family by working in a shoe factory and struggled to adjust to the expectations of school.

Every day, we learned more about them until one day our hearts sank, learning that the family had once been much larger. Their father and oldest brother were both killed in Afghanistan, forcing them to flee to Pakistan. While there, they lived as "urban refugees" with many other Afghan migrants. A second older brother disappeared from the family under unknown circumstances and was never seen or heard from again. Eventually, their mother became ill and passed away. With their mother's passing, the siblings were alone in a foreign country where they did not fit in with a young, uneducated boy as their sole breadwinner. The two adult sisters worked as much as possible, but because they were women, steady work was unavailable. And when one sister was stabbed in the



arm by a stranger on a motorcycle, she was partially disabled and unable to do her usual work of making clothes and doing henna. Through the despair and loss, they made ends meet.

Life was not easy. The family was under constant stress, seeking survival every day. They pulled through because they had each other. They did not have large meals, warm shoes, soft beds, or a room full of toys, so they clung to each other instead; and together they blessed our community with their compassionate spirits.

Today, the two adult sisters rent a two-bedroom apartment in Riverdale, MD. They have their second bedroom set up for Nadia and Sadaf, who come every weekend to visit, along with Faisal and Noormal. They attend weddings, birthday parties, and other special events with their new community of Afghan neighbors. The adult sisters are completing the licensing process to become D.C. foster parents and eagerly await Nadia and Sadaf's move into their home. The sisters hope to eventually move into a larger apartment and have Noormal and Faisal (now adults themselves) move in with them, as well.

ATTENTION: LSS/NCA can now train foster parents in Virginia, in addition to Maryland and D.C. Ten refugee youth need immediate placements. Join an upcoming orientation or contact us to learn more. Patricia Britt; BrittP@LSSNCA.org; (202) 723-3000 ext. 254

Refugee Art Featured at Sandy Spring Museum Exhibit

By: Amy Meli, Congregational and Community Outreach

“Art is humanity’s most essential, most universal language.” —Ernest Boyer

It’s often said that art is the way to experience life through the eyes of others. People in the Washington, D.C. area have a chance to do just that in experiencing “Uprooted: The Art of Refugees,” an exhibit currently on display at the Sandy Spring Museum in Sandy Spring, MD.

In the exhibit, six artists from countries including Iraq, Ethiopia, and Somalia depict their lives before and after coming to the U.S. as refugees. Many artists, including Ahmad Alkarkhi, were prominent in the field of art before their journey to the U.S.

During the museum’s World Refugee Day celebration on June 20, a representative from LSS/NCA was a featured speaker, along with staff from Casa de Maryland and The International Rescue Committee.

Visitors can view the exhibit from now through Sunday, September 2, at Sandy Spring Museum located at 17901 Bentley Road, Sandy Spring, MD, 20860.



Annandale Congregations Host Dinner & Film Screenings Featuring the Refugee Journey

By: Amy Meli, Congregational and Community Outreach

Over the past three months, a group of churches in Annandale, Virginia, has hosted a series of film screenings featuring the global refugee crisis, the U.S. response, and what our communities can do to help in the resettlement of refugees.

One of the events, held on Saturday, May 5, at Ravensworth Baptist Church, featured a documentary entitled “The Afghan Interpreters,” which featured people who worked alongside our military in Afghanistan and are now being persecuted in their home countries. They are in the process of applying for residency in the U.S under the Special Immigrant Visa program, which is currently stalled due to the lack of State Department staff.

After the screening, LSS/NCA staff participated in a panel discussion that discussed the situation in Afghanistan and how our community can help support those who are resettling in the DMV.

Before the event, participants enjoyed a meal of Kurdish food prepared by a recently-resettled refugee who is planning to open a catering business.

If your organization or congregation is interested in hosting a dinner or film screening, we would love to be a part of it! Please contact Amy Meli (melia@lssnca.org) for more information.



Volunteers serve a delicious meal prepared by a talented, recently-resettled cook.

Our Summer Needs

BICYCLE EVENT NEEDS

Donations:

- Bicycles (new or gently used)
- Food for the event
- Trash bags
- Cleaning supplies
- Helmets

Volunteers:

- Preparing the outdoor area for the event (bring your gardening supplies!)
- Event set-up/clean-up
- Working at the event to assist with awards and help with activities

YOUTH HAVEN CAMP NEEDS

Cleaning supplies:

- Lysol
- Hand soap
- Paper towels

Outdoor supplies:

- Sunblock
- Bug spray
- Beach towels
- Flip flops
- Goggles

Cabin supplies:

- Toothbrushes
- Toothpaste
- Deodorant
- Pillows

Nonperishable snacks:

- Trail mix
- Apple sauce
- Granola bars
- Peanut butter crackers
- Popcorn

Gift cards:

- Walmart
- Chick-fil-A
- Chipotle



Bike Event to Recognize Resettled Students' First Year in the U.S.

By: Amy Meli, Congregational and Community Outreach

While refugee admissions into the U.S. have slowed considerably, LSS/NCA is busy working with the unprecedented number of refugee families we welcomed last year who are building their new lives in our community. As part of that effort, a school liaison helps register children for school and implements enrichment programs, especially during the summer months.

To help students acclimate to their new schools, on August 11, 2018, LSS/NCA is planning to celebrate all refugee students who completed their first year of school in the U.S. At the event, LSS/NCA will present bicycles to recognize top students. In addition to celebrating these students, the event will encourage healthy lifestyles and provide the opportunity to ride instead of drive.

In order to make this event a success, we need your help! See the sidebar for information about ways to get involved.

SEND A CHILD TO CAMP THIS SUMMER

By: Amy Meli, Congregational and Community Outreach

Over the summer, LSS/NCA will host two overnight camping retreats in Maryland's Catocin Mountains. At these camps, children and youth who are impacted by HIV/AIDS, mental health diagnoses, or substance abuse will have an opportunity to play, learn, and spend time outdoors with camp leaders, volunteers, and friends. At camp, youth will engage in team-building activities, find encouragement to overcome personal fears, and find support through peers and counselors.



This opportunity is only possible because of your support and we need a great deal of help! Contact Amy Meli at melia@lssnca.org to learn more about how you can get involved by volunteering as a camp counselor, donating items to support the campers, or funding camp scholarships so we can keep the program free for campers.

If interested in donating or volunteering for activities mentioned on this page contact: Amy Meli at Melia@lssnca.org

Bold Journey Scholarships Worth \$20,000 Awarded to LSS/NCA Clients

By: Susan Haine, Development Director

In May, LSS/NCA announced five winners of its second year of scholarships funded by the Stronger Together Centennial Campaign. Applicants for the Bold Journey Scholarship can be holders of Special Immigrant Visas, participants in our Youth Haven camp and programs, or clients who were recently served through our Foster Care and Adoption services. Scholarship recipients received awards ranging from \$2,000 to \$9,300.

Our congratulations to Carlos Aragon, Andre Bisimwa, Luwam Ermias, Basir Ahmad Jalali, and Ahmadullah Mafthoon.

The Volunteer Scholarship Committee was overwhelmed by the applications, the heartbreaking stories of loss, and the resulting determination to succeed. Each applicant was confident in their goals and hopeful for a better and brighter future than they had experienced in the past. Applications were filled with dreams of becoming accountants, engineers, lawyers, nurses, and therapists.

One committee member commented, *"It was truly an honor to review and evaluate the applications of numerous individuals who have exemplified*

incredible dedication, resilience, and boldness in the face of complex adversity. The narratives, reflections, and educational goals of applicants were moving and quite remarkable."

The 2019 Bold Journey Scholarship competition will be announced in January 2019. With your contribution to the scholarship fund, LSS/NCA can award more funding for our applicants and provide opportunity to accomplish their goals. If you'd like to contribute, a check or online donation can be noted for the purpose of Bold Journey Scholarships.

Expressions of Abundance Breakfasts Feature Unaccompanied Minors

By: Susan Haine, Development Director

Hello. My name is Dieudonne and I am here today to share my journey with you. It began 14 years ago when I was 3 years old. I was living in DRC Congo with my grandparents. Both my parents had died. There were always wars going on. It was never safe.

One night, we were inside the house. People broke in. We had no warning. There was yelling and loud bangs. I remember my grandfather died that night.

These are the opening lines of the speech given by Dieudonne, an Unaccompanied Refugee Minor, at our Virginia Expressions for Abundance breakfast in May. After time in a refugee camp, Dieudonne arrived in America where he was embraced by a new family, finding himself with not only a foster mother and father, but also younger siblings. He is a dedicated student who just finished his

junior year of high school and has hopes of studying at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, to become a pilot. This dream was inspired by his flight to the U.S., when he felt freedom and hope for the first time.

My journey to get to this day has been long. I was born in Eritrea. When I was 12 years old, I stopped attending school to go to work and support my family. Every day, I would go out into the open field with the hope of finding gold by digging the ground, and then sell it to buy food and other things we needed for the family.

Luwam spoke at a breakfast hosted in Maryland. She arrived knowing no English and was placed with an Eritrean foster mother, who welcomed her with open arms. Her mother and caseworker helped Luwam understand that in America, education is the way to succeed. She has proven to be an



Dieudonne with his foster family.

outstanding student, as well as a track and field star, who has been accepted at Marymount University.

We are grateful to Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Falls Church and St. Luke Lutheran Church in Silver Spring for hosting the events, the friends and supporters who attended, and the generous donors who made both events a success, culminating in over \$100,000 in donations.



A Comment from Chris

Dear Friends:

As a community and as an organization, we have experienced a great deal of change over the past year. Last winter, the Child and Family Services Agency of Washington, DC (CFSA) moved forward with plans to redesign their system, to provide foster care services in-house for children placed in D.C. homes and to contract with only one provider for foster care services for children placed in Maryland homes. LSS/NCA, along with 5 other local foster care agencies, closed their traditional foster care programs.

At the same time, executive orders, federal government hiring freezes, and admission requirement changes have dramatically slowed the arrival of refugee families. While we continue to serve the record-breaking number of arrivals we saw last year, as they continue on their journey to self-sufficiency, LSS/NCA has welcomed less than a dozen refugee families into our community over the past three months (compared to 75 families during the same period last year).

While these changes have created challenges, they have also encouraged growth and positive transformation. They have allowed us to utilize our resources to look beyond the status quo and identify larger service gaps in our community, affording us the opportunity to reach new, vulnerable populations. As the opioid epidemic grows across the country, we are expanding our Youth Development and Wellness program to offer camps and retreats to youth and families challenged by the stigma of substance abuse and mental health diagnoses. While already contracted in Maryland and DC, last month, we expanded our ability to train foster care homes in Virginia. This will bolster our ability to serve more unaccompanied refugee minors like Luwam and Dieudonne (page 6).

Despite the changes we have experienced together, the inspirational stories herein exemplify how your support continues to offer hope to those in their darkest moments. You have reunited families, saved lives, and provided strength in moments of despair. Thank you for standing with us.

Blessings,

Christine P. Connell
CEO

Board of Directors

Ms. Lynn Tedesco, Chairperson
The Honorable Mary Warlick, Vice Chair
Mr. Chris Hunter, Treasurer
Ms. Kimberly Williams-Jenkins, Secretary
Mr. Abed Ali
Ms. Karla Ver Bryck Block
Ms. Vanessa Brown
Ms. Meha Desai
Ms. Joan Durman
Rev. Anteneh Gebreselassie
Ms. Kim Green
Pastor John Hagedorn
Ms. Alice Hedt
Mr. Daniel Mekibib

Ex-Officio Members of the Board

The Reverend Dr. John Denninger,
President
Lutheran Church Missouri Synod
(LCMS), Southeastern District
*Represented by The Rev. Kenneth
G. Carlson*

The Rev. Richard Graham, Bishop
ELCA Metropolitan Washington, D.C.,
Synod

Christine P. Connell, CEO

LSS/NCA Offices

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

4406 Georgia Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20011
(202) 723-3000

MARYLAND

3799 East-West Hwy
Hyattsville, MD 20782
(240) 714-4034

2503 Belair Dr.
Bowie, MD 20715
(301) 809-5558

VIRGINIA

7401 Leesburg Pike
Falls Church, VA 22043
(703) 698-5026

1601 Prince William Pkwy.
Woodbridge, VA 22191



After a tragic accident, your support
gave Mewael the gift of life.

PAGE 2

INSIDE THIS EDITION



A Brave Girl's Attempt to End the HIV Epidemic

*Katrina shares her HIV status to
encourage others and defeat STIGMA*

Read more on front cover

SAVE THE DATES

- | | |
|-----------|--|
| JULY 12 | Presentation at the Woodbridge Rotary Club (VA) |
| AUGUST 26 | All Saints Lutheran Church Ministry Fair (MD) |
| SEPT. 20 | Refugee & Immigration Town Hall Meeting (DC) |

For more information & events, visit
LSSNCA.org

CONGREGATIONS HOST
REFUGEE FILM SCREENINGS

4 COMMUNITY

OUR LIST OF
SUMMER NEEDS

5 VOLUNTEER

BIKES TO RECOGNIZE
REFUGEE STUDENTS

5 VOLUNTEER

SCHOLARSHIPS WORTH
\$20,000 AWARDED

6 DEVELOPMENT

Giving to LSSNCA through the Combined Federal Campaign and United Way

Look for us in the enrollment materials.

United Way #8146 | CFC #78343